
Airbus Helicopters to design new compound rotorcraft demonstrator in the frame of Clean Sky 2 program

Marignane, 16 July 2014 – The design of a large-scale compound rotorcraft demonstrator dubbed LifeRCraft (Low Impact Fast & Efficient RotorCraft) will be led by Airbus Helicopters in the framework of Europe's Clean Sky 2 Joint Technology Initiative, which was formally launched last week at Brussels.

The go-ahead for this second phase of the Clean Sky effort will enable Airbus Helicopters to apply expertise gained from its highly successful X³ hybrid testbed, while also benefitting from the company's track record of helicopter innovation in airframe construction, integrated systems, flight controls and aerodynamics.

The LifeRCraft architecture combines fixed wings for energy-efficient lift, open propellers for high-efficiency propulsion, and a main rotor that provides VTOL (vertical takeoff and landing) flight capabilities.

Launched in 2008, Clean Sky is a multi-year public-private partnership involving the European Commission and Europe's aviation industry, with the goal of bringing significant step changes to reducing the sector's environmental impact. Through a multi-phase approach, Clean Sky 2 is the continuation to the progress achieved in the first Clean Sky Programme which will end in 2017. It intends to speed up technological breakthrough developments and shorten the time-to-market for more competitive and cleaner air transport solutions tested on full scale demonstrators. Through open calls Clean Sky 2 will involve a range of partners throughout Europe, in particular SMEs.

With today's formal Clean Sky 2 go-ahead, the Airbus Helicopters-led compound rotorcraft program's timing calls for preliminary studies, architecture and specification activity starting this year, with development and testing of component and subsystems envisioned in the 2016-2018 timeframe. Flight evaluations could start in early 2019.

“Clean Sky 2 underscores Europe's commitment to aligning its strengths and significantly increasing investment in research and technology, building on such advancements as the X³ hybrid demonstrator that successfully validated the compound aircraft configuration and proved its capabilities with a significant breakthrough in terms of rotorcraft speed,” explained Tomasz Krysinski, Airbus Helicopters' Vice President – Research and Innovation. “This will position European industry for the potential development of a commercial aircraft based on this concept, with reduced risk before a go/no-go decision is made.”

Such a future compound aircraft would combine higher cruise speeds with excellent vertical takeoff and landing performance at affordable operating costs, making it well-suited for such vital public service duties as emergency medical airlift, search and rescue, coast guard and border patrol operations; while also contributing to the overall enhancement of mobility through operations ranging from passenger transport and inter-city shuttle services to off-shore airlift for the oil and gas sector.

Within the frame of the first Clean Sky program Airbus Helicopters is a major player in another demonstrator project, the Green Rotorcraft platform. This includes the development of a High Compression Engine with the aim to drastically reduce the fuel consumption and gas emission of the next generation of light helicopters. Ground tests based on a modified EC120 are planned for the third quarter of 2014.

About Airbus Helicopters

Airbus Helicopters, formerly Eurocopter, is a division of Airbus Group, a global pioneer in aerospace and defense related services. Airbus Helicopters is the world's No. 1 helicopter manufacturer and employs more than 23,000 people worldwide. With 46 percent market share in civil and parapublic sectors, the company's fleet in service includes some 12,000 helicopters operated by more than 3,000 customers in approximately 150 countries. Airbus Helicopters' international presence is marked by its subsidiaries and participations in 21 countries, and its worldwide network of service centers, training facilities, distributors and certified agents. Airbus Helicopters' range of civil and military helicopters is the world's largest; its aircraft account for one third of the worldwide civil and parapublic fleet. The company's chief priority is to ensure the safe operation of its aircraft for the thousands of people who fly more than 3 million hours per year.

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